

MATSU

All-American:
High school sports,
farming, family,
serving their
country are
perimeters of life

By T.S. LAST
NEWS-BULLETIN STAFF WRITER

Sometimes you can't take things at face value and that much is true of the Matsu family who came to Valencia County nearly 75 years ago.

Born of Japanese parents who came over to America at the turn of the century, their ancestry is obvious to anyone who meets them. But if you look a little closer, you will recognize that the Matsus are strikingly American. The four children who remain living in the county are as much rooted here as the crops they've grown on the family farm in Jarales for decades.

The eldest son, James (Tetsuo) can still be found out in the garden laboring under the hot sun.

"I don't like to sit around the house," James said, but he does take a break from the heat to watch his beloved Dodgers play an afternoon game on TV.

Sister Violet (Sumiko), who lives on the farm with James and their youngest brother Charles, calls James the head of the household and, in fact, he is and always has been as the oldest American citizen in the family since his birth in Los Angeles in 1921.

Evidently Los Angeles was just a brief stop while the family made their way east to where they finally settled in Valencia County.

Tomitaro Shigematsu was a 17-year-old boy when he and his brother came to America in 1903 in search of prosperity. His name was quickly Americanized to Tom Matsu and he and his brother soon began working as farm laborers near San Jose, Calif. Tom would later tell his children that from there he could see San Francisco burning in the wake of the great earthquake of 1906.

The brothers decided to try their own hand at farming by leasing land in the fertile fields of the San Joaquin Valley near Stockton, Calif. By that time the United States was engaged in World War I and the brothers helped the war effort by farming and working for the railroad.

No one is certain what led Tom to Los Angeles, but it's likely he moved on after his brother's death from typhoid fever. Tom may have abandoned farming for a time to work full time with the railroad.

While in Los Angeles, Tom sent for his bride, Chiyo Shinoda, and they were married in 1920. She could speak no English when she arrived in America but it wasn't long before she settled into her role as a mother with the birth of James. Soon thereafter the young family moved to Winslow, Ariz., where a second son, George (Katsumi), who is called "Kotch," was born. Farming in Winslow wasn't much to fall back on when Tom lost his job with the railroad, so the family moved again, this time to Clovis where Tom had gotten a job with the Santa Fe line as a messenger. A third son, Noboro, was born there but again, the family didn't stay long.

In about 1927, Tom was transferred to Belen where his proficiency with a paintbrush got him the job of lettering signs, railroad cars and locomotives. Charles and Violet

were born in Belen and the family, now complete, lived in the railroad camps.

The children began attending Belen Schools and led a rather typical existence for families that lived through the Great Depression. Although their features were distinctive from everyone else, the Matsus generally blended in with the other children, making friends and participating in school activities. The boys played sports and Violet played piano.

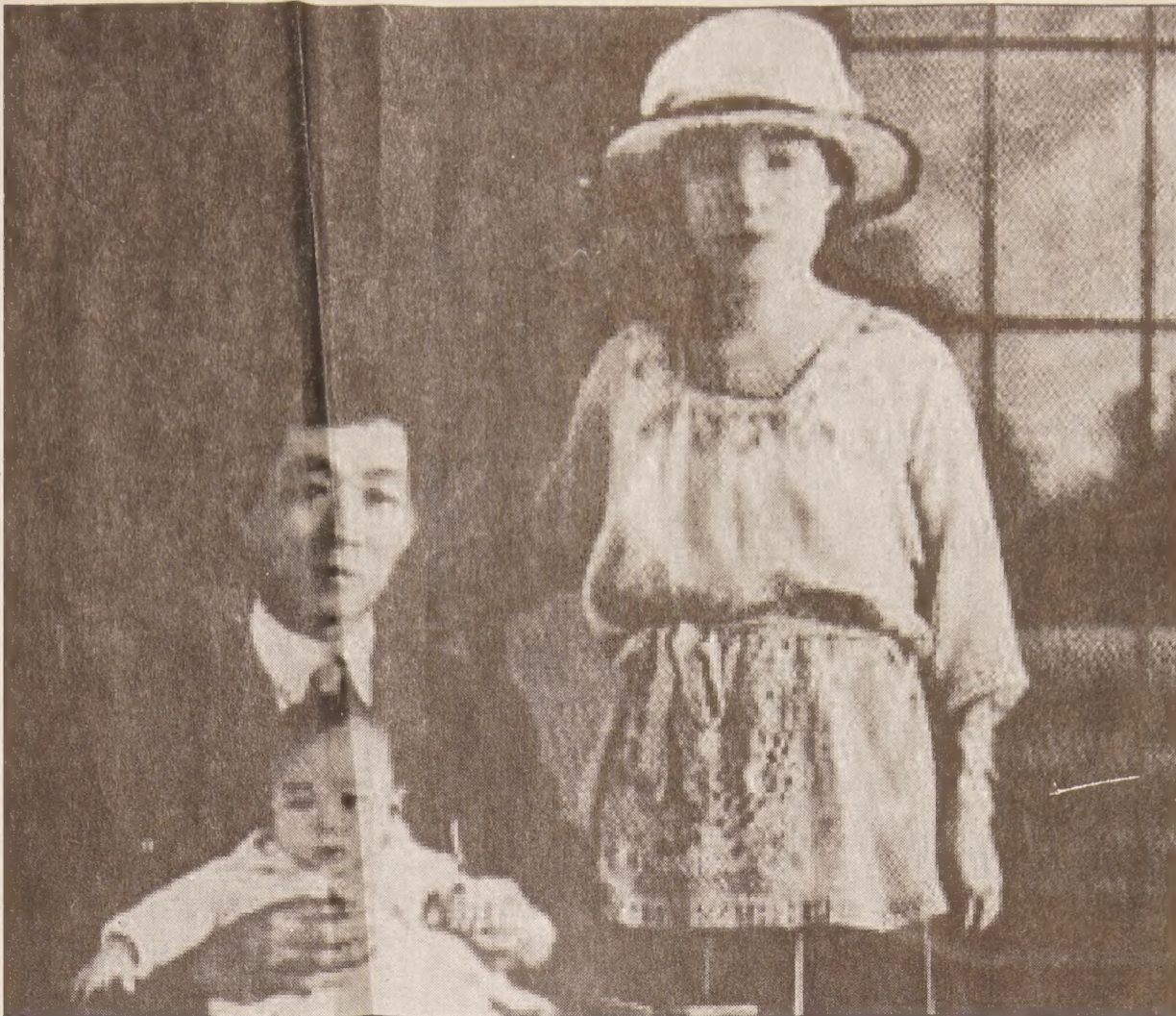
Then came the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. Though always viewed as different from the mostly Anglo and Hispanic families that lived in the area, the bombing raid on Pearl Harbor changed, for some, how the Matsus were perceived in the community.

Tensions were high across the country and many Japanese-Americans were assigned to internment camps, segregated from society and the lives they had been living before the war.

"It was rough during the war being Japanese," Kotch said. "My dad he lost his job on the railroad...They gave us a choice. Immigration said we could go or stay. They said it was for our own protection."

But people in Belen like the Beckers, the Lupolds and Feils were supportive of them and the Matsus stayed. Still, Tom lost his job with the railroad during the war and again turned to farming to support the family.

By 1943, the family moved to Jarales to begin farming the land they have worked ever since. James had been attending the University of New Mexico when war broke out but quit school to help his father in the endeavor. The younger children were still in school but



Baby James was the first of the Matsus born an American citizen, shown here with his parents Tomitaro (Tom) and Chiyo Shinoda Matsu.

when Kotch came of age, he enlisted in the army and was assigned to an all Japanese-American infantry combat unit.

Kotch said that was strange because he had never been around Japanese-Americans before.

"It was really embarrassing," he said. "I'd call roll and couldn't even pronounce the names. All I knew was Chavez or Baca."

When asked what it was like to be in the army while his country was at war with Japan, Kotch said, "It was really sort of depressing. Some people would look down on you. But I was never ashamed. I was proud...I wanted to go. Like my dad used to say, there is nothing better than to fight for your country."

Kotch's 442nd unit was sent overseas, initially to Italy, but then to southern France when the action heated up there.

Kotch said while in the army he never experienced any animosity against him for being Japanese while fighting in the European theater. "They never did. They couldn't because they always depended on us. We were the most decorated outfit in the United States."

In 1944, Kotch's contribution to the war effort ended. "It was just one of those things," he said. "I got hit."

Kotch's lung was damaged by shrapnel from a German artillery

shell and he spent the next nine months in hospitals in Europe and the United States before returning home to Valencia County where he has remained.

Just after the war, Kotch started up Teen Town, a drive-in that was a haven for youngsters to play games and socialize on Fifth Street in Belen. He later spent 20 years operating Kotch's Cafe on Main Street before finishing out his working life with the post office.

Charles also joined the service when he came of age. After two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, killing thousands but hastening an end to the war, Charles was assigned to occupational forces there. As an American serviceman, Charles spent a year and one-half in the country of his parents' birth in the immediate aftermath of the bombing. It causes one to muse about what would have been had Tomitaro Shigematsu not decided to embark on a search for his American Dream.

Back home during the war the others fought their own battles against animosity and prejudice.

"I thought it was hard," Violet remembers. "These guys don't take it as hard as I do. But there is prejudice everywhere...You have to accept it."

The Matsus seemed to have accepted that they will always be

looked upon as different. Sometimes it's prejudice; sometimes it's ignorance; sometimes it's typecasting; or sometimes, as Violet suggests, it's just curiosity.

"Some people have never seen an Oriental person before," she said. "You walk in somewhere and they stare at you. It's not that they're prejudiced, it's curiosity."

Violet thinks it's funny when people meet her and her Caucasian husband, James Culbreth.

"First, they expect me to have an accent. And my husband is from North Carolina and has this big southern drawl. They don't expect that I'm from around here and he's not."

The Matsu family survived the war and Tom continued to farm until he suffered a stroke and died in 1960. Chiyo Shinoda lived for another 30 years after her husband's death, leaving the five children to carry on the family name.

Noboro was the only one to permanently leave Valencia County. According to his siblings, Noboro was born with a generous portion of the brains in the family. James remembered him taking apart a watch just to see what made it tick. Violet said she remembered one day when Noboro came home with a cord casing full of copper wires.

Violet recalls the day he came running into the house. "Mama, he

said, 'Some day you're going to be able to talk through this.'"

Noboro went on to school at the University of California at Berkeley where Violet said in 1966 "engineers took him back east."

No one can really say what it is Noboro did for a living — it's very technical, they say — but he worked for some corporation in Westminster, Md., where he lives with his wife, Toni. Now retired, Noboro and Toni have five children.

Kotch has children too — two boys, George and James, who are both married and living in Albuquerque. He has a step-daughter, Sandra King living in California, and a step-son who recently passed away. Kotch still lives in Belen with his wife, Helen, whose brother happens to be James Culbreth, Violet's husband. They live together on the Matsu farm in a separate home.

Charles also has a separate residence on the property where he lives with his wife, Caroline.

James said farming is a lot of work for a little gain. His father, who came to America to find prosperity, worked hard and was able to send his children to college, but never was able to enjoy the fruits of his labor — or the vegetables in his case — during his lifetime. James recalls only one year, and it was after his father's death, when farming was really prosperous. A bumper lettuce crop in 1967 helped keep the farm going.

But looking out over the farm that Tom Matsu started more than 50 years ago with not much more than a hose and later a tractor, it is easy to recognize that the Matsus have earned their prosperity. The green fields that make up the 250 acres of the family farm are something you can take at face value.



The Matsu children in a photo from 1992 are (left to right) James, Kotch, Noboro, Charles and Violet.

CORDOVA

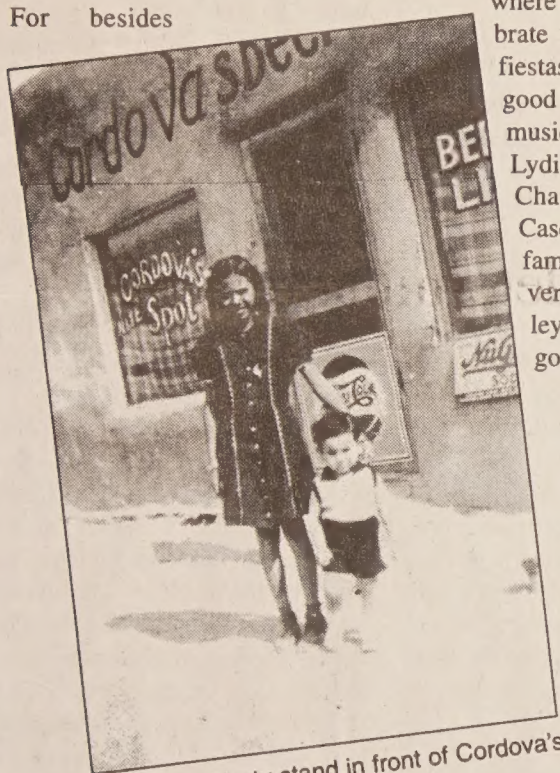
If you were from Jarales, you were considered family

By SANDY BATTIN
NEWS-BULLETIN STAFF WRITER

Casey Cordova still lives in the house he was born in.

Of course, life is much quieter these days in the Jarales home where he grew up as the second youngest in a family of five, after Sam, Gil and Lydia and just before Marty.

He and wife Ruth have renovated the place, added brick exterior walls outside the original adobe. It makes you wonder what those walls would say if only they could speak.



Lydia and Marty stand in front of Cordova's Grocery in Jarales in 1946.

sheltering the brood of Pula and Sally Cordova, this spot was the crossroads of Jarales. It was here that folks would stop by to pick up a bag of flour, buy the kids a penny candy or two and stop to visit with their neighbors.

You could get it all at Cordova's Grocery, the family business that once was operated here. You could fill up your tank with gas from the big pumps that filled a glass container at the top to the proper amount of fuel and then, through gravity, brought it down into your car. To one side was the big hall where people would celebrate weddings or church fiestas or simply have a good time dancing to the music they loved.

Lydia — her last name is Chavez now — and Casey don't know their family's history in the verdant irrigated valley, but they know it goes back generations.



The Cordovas gathered for a photo in 1981 on their parents' 50th anniversary when their father was still alive. Shown are (from left) Sam, Lydia, Pula, Sally, Marty, Casey and Gil.

What they do know is that their mother was an Albuquerque girl who met their father at a carnival and they fell in love and married in 1931.

Pula worked at the Harvey House and farmed his land in Jarales. He'd come home and talk about the politicians he'd see at the popular Belen railroad eatery — Sen. Clinton Anderson and Rep. Dennis Chavez.

In 1934, the Cordovas opened their store. It was a success. "It was needed in the area," Lydia recalled. "Nobody had transportation to get into Belen — there were just horse-drawn wagons."

In some ways, being the child of the storekeeper had its advantages. "I'd get candy and give it to my friends," Casey remembered.

But Lydia said the children had a limit on what they could take. Money was scarce in those days and people tried to stretch every penny. "People here were very poor. My grandchildren waste food today, but I don't like to waste things. We knew what it was like not to have so many things," she said.

The children would pick the wild watermelons that grew everywhere and no one minded if children plucked an apple or a peach from a tree in an orchard. When their father butchered a pig, Casey remembers delivering packages of its meat to all his neighbors; when it was their turn to butcher, they did the same.

Life was idyllic in the little farming community, a good place to grow up in for the children from the houses up and down the road. The Cordovas and their friends used to catch a ride with the conservancy ditchrider or they'd walk two-and-one-half miles over the railroad tracks to go to the movies in Belen.

"We wanted to see Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. But people were

ing.

Jarales even had its own school — two rooms where the children started kindergarten. "They called it the baby room," Lydia remembered. "It was so exciting. We'd never seen clay or crayons."

But Casey was homesick. He'd take off for home every time he could and would have to be taken back to class by his mother.

The children thought their school lunches were wonderful. "I loved the pork and beans," Lydia said. "And they served canned milk! We had milk from our cows, but this was canned! I really wanted it."

After school, priests and nuns would visit the children and teach them their catechism.

People were very religious. Lydia remembers how they would pray for rain, starting at the San Francisco Xavier church and moving up the road, folks joining in as the procession passed their houses.

The priest arrived for Mass once a month. At other times, people would travel to Belen — either walking or finding a ride with someone who owned a car.

Pula bought the first truck Earl Caldwell sold at his new lot in Belen. He and Sally made sure their children attended Mass every week. But the streets were all unpaved and, if a heavy rain fell, they'd become impassable. Everyone had to stay home.

Growing up with four brothers, Lydia was a tomboy. "She was the



The door of the old dance hall is the background for a 1942 photo of a dapper Pula and son Casey.

for running. Although Casey became quite an athlete, he said he was never able to beat his sister's speeds.

For every season, there was a game: hopscotch, jacks, marbles. Lydia remembers she had calluses on her hands from playing marbles so often. The children would take a piece of sheep skin and use it to cushion their hands when they played high-

stake, winner-take-all marbles. She remembers the boys of the village fuming when she won their steelies.

The Cordovas were among the first families to get electricity and Lydia remembers that "it was something to have it that bright."

Casey added that when Joe Louis had his fights, practically the entire community would come over to listen to the spectacular doings on the radio.

It wasn't all fun. Children worked, too. Casey used to stomp down the hay when his father bailed. The family grew its own wheat and took it down to the nearby mill to be made into flour for tortillas. They raised pigs, sheep, goats, cattle.

When the Cordovas moved to Belen in 1951, Casey didn't want to go. He'd take off on his bike and pedal back home to Jarales and his friends.

At Sixth and Castillo where the Longhorn Cafe is now, the family built the Cactus Bar. Casey stayed in Belen long enough to meet Ruth, a cheerleader who got up in Sausal along north Gabaldon Road. They became high school sweethearts.

Belen. "We used to dance on Saturday nights," he said.

There were dances during the big Belen fiestas, too, and celebrations in Los Chavez, Bosque, Pueblitos, Jarales, Isleta and Tome.

In 1958, the cheerleader and the athlete married and in 1962 they moved to Casey's beloved home in Jarales. His father gave him the house and he remodeled it. The store is where the den now is and the dance hall has been pulled down.

"I had never heard of Jarales," Ruth said.

"Now I can't get her out of here," her husband countered.

The children of many of the people they once knew now live in the family homes.

Casey, who is a barber in Albuquerque, works his 10 acres of land, planting mainly alfalfa. Ruth has completed 23 years as a school secretary.

Lydia is a homemaker who takes care of the Cordovas' mother, who is 87 years old. Their father died at 91 about three years ago. Sam is a retired stockbroker who lives in California, but comes home often to do things such as organize an art show at Our Lady of Belen Church.

Gil is retired from a Department of Energy job in Albuquerque, Marty works as a bookkeeper in Albuquerque. The five have 18 children, 30 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren among them.

All love coming home and see that big cities and other faraway places don't have that cohesiveness, that sense of unity they found in a tiny Valencia County village several decades ago. "Anyone from Jarales, I figure is part of my family. You don't have that anymore. It was a very close community. I just figured everyone was like that," Lydia said.

"You felt their deaths very hard.... My dad helped a lot of people in need, giving them food, getting them jobs, taking them to their jobs, the kind of stuff that everyone should be doing."

"Everyone made time for the family."

customers Baca Auto

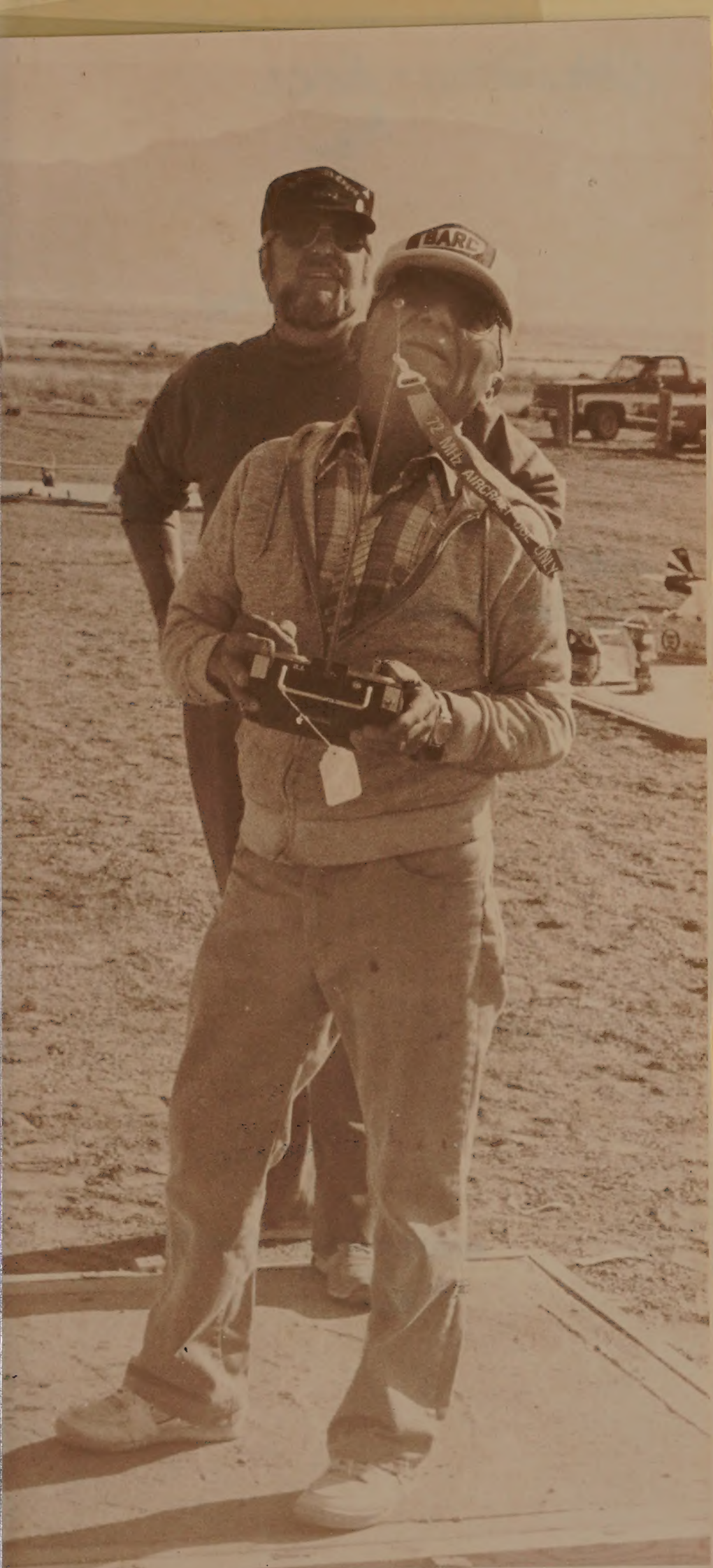
C. business is working with a third generation of customers. Employees check vehicles in minute detail before they are allowed even to be offered for sale.

Technology has made a big difference in the vehicle business. Financing deals are closed more quickly thanks to computer modems and fax machines. Vehicle problems are diagnosed much more easily in the service department with equipment developed over the last 10 or so years.

Ten financing sources are available through Baca Auto.

Everyone at Baca Auto keeps up to date by paying attention to industry information as well as attending classes.

Baca Auto's growth has been constant and continued growth is what the people at Baca Auto see in the future.



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Kotcho MATSU - BARC

Belen

ARIZONA

Radio

Control

CWb.

Airport

North of

Rio Communities, NM

airport

V.C. News-Bulletin

J. Sloan

Kotcho CASH

HARVEY HOUSE MUSEUM

P.O. Box 166

Belen, NM 87002



BHHC-2-1-44-3
Pusthouse



KOTCH'S CAFE
BELEN, NEW MEXICO

North VINTSO

KOTCH'S CAFE

BELEN, NEW MEXICO

BREAKFAST SERVED AT ALL HOURS

We Serve Large Country Fresh Eggs

WE SERVE BUTTER

No. 1	JUICE, HAM, OMELET, BUTTERED TOAST, JELLY, HOT COFFEE	\$1 ⁰⁰
No. 2	CHOICE OF FRESH, CRISP CEREALS, TWO EGGS (<i>As You Like Them</i>), BUTTERED TOAST, HOT COFFEE	\$1 ⁰⁰
No. 3	ONE EGG, BACON (<i>Two Strips</i>), BUTTERED TOAST, HOT COFFEE	80 ^c
No. 4	GRIDDLE CAKES, TWO EGGS, HOT COFFEE	90 ^c
No. 5	FRIED EGGS (2) WITH HAM, BACON OR SAUSAGE	\$1 ⁰⁰

Fruits and Juices

Orange Juice	20-30	Pineapple Juice	20-30
Tomato Juice	20-30	Grapefruit (half)	25
Grapefruit Juice	20-30	Prunes	20
Prune Juice	20-30	Sliced Bananas with Cream	30

From the Grill

Fresh Egg (1) (as you like it), Potatoes, Toast, Coffee	50	Fresh Eggs (2) (as you like them), Potatoes, Toast, Coffee	75
One Egg	20	Order of Ham, Bacon or Sausage	40
Two Eggs	40	Order of Fried Potatoes	30
Plain Omelet (3 Eggs)		90	

Griddle Cakes, Toast and Rolls

Short Stack	35	French Toast	50
Griddle Cakes with Syrup	45	Fresh Doughnuts (2)	20
Hot Roll with Butter	20	Toast, Dry or Buttered	20
Milk Toast	50	Cinnamon Toast	30

"KOTCH'S" Special Breakfast

ORANGE JUICE
ONE POACHED EGG
BACON OR HAM
TOAST
COFFEE

90^c

FRESH, CRISP CEREALS
OATMEAL, CREAM-O-WHEAT
WITH MILK—30c WITH HALF & HALF—35c

Special Treat

JUICE
ONE PORK CHOP
TWO EGGS
COFFEE

\$1¹⁰

Menu

DINNERS

ROAST BEEF	1.45
ROAST PORK	1.45
CHICKEN FRIED STEAK	1.60
BREADED VEAL	1.60
VEGETABLE PLATE	1.25
BREADED PORK CHOP	1.50
HAMBURGER STEAK	1.45

All Steaks Charcoal Broiled

A la CARTE

Club Steak	2.00	Hamburger Steak	1.45
Top Sirloin	3.50	Enchilada	1.00
T-Bone Steak (Special)	3.00	With One Egg	1.20
Rib Steak	2.50	With Two Eggs	1.30
Chicken Fried Steak	1.60	French Fried Potatoes	30
Breaded Veal	1.60	All Soups	30
Breaded Pork Chop (1)	1.50	Bowl of Chili	40
Breaded Pork Chops (2)	1.75	Bowl of Chili with Beans	45

KOTCH'S SPECIAL SANDWICH

CHILI BURGER WITH LETTUCE,
CHEESE AND ONIONS

70c

HALF ORDER — 40c

JAPANESE SUKIYAKI

Bambo Shoots, Mushrooms
Celery, Onions, Sirloin Steak
With Sakai, Shoyu and Rice

\$1.50

SALADS

Fruit Salad	90	Chef's Salad	95
Cottage Cheese	45	Lettuce & Tomato	50

SANDWICHES

Hamburger	30	Lettuce and Tomato	30
Deluxe	50	Fried Egg	40
Cheeseburger	40	Chicken or Tuna Fish Salad	50
Deluxe	60	Egg Salad	40
Ham—Fried or Cold	50	Ham Salad	45
Cheese, Plain	35	Peanut Butter and Jelly	35
Cheese, Grilled	40	Cube Steak	75
Bacon and Tomato	50	Barbecued Beef or Pork	50
Bacon	40	Hot Beef or Pork with	
Ham or Bacon and Egg	65	Potatoes and Gravy	85
Ham and Cheese	60		

DESSERTS

Pie or Cake	20	Ice Cream or Sherbet	10-20
a la Mode	30	Fruit Jello	20

BEVERAGES

Fresh Hot Coffee	10	Ice Cold Milk	10-15
Hot Tea	15	Chocolate Milk	15-20
Iced Tea	10	Hot Chocolate	20
Cold Pop	15	Buttermilk	10-15

FOUNTAIN

Ice Cream	10-20	Coca-Cola	10
Sundaes	35	Sodas	25
Malt	35	Floats	25
Milk Shakes	35	Banana Splits	45

Kotch's Cafe Menu
gifted to me from Jeff Trumbly.
July 2018

BHHC-2-1-44

KATCH MATSU

